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ABSTRACT

A distinction among evaluation, measurement and reports of terminal behavior is presented. For the purposes of evaluation, any response to a speech performance provides useful feedback to the communicator. In addition to the teacher's evaluation of the performance against "established standards", it is argued that a teacher's subjective responses should be combined with more extensive use of peer evaluation and self evaluation. All of these forms of feedback provide subjective but relevant sources of information about the communicative act. None of these should have any bearing on the teacher's accountability to the educational system or the student's course grades. With respect to measurement, the point is made that even if a valid and reliable measurement of speech performances were possible, it would be undesirable in terms of other course objectives ascribed to by most teachers. While refinement of measurement techniques should be continued for the improvement of written examinations and speech contests, the only measurement of classroom performances should be explicit and objective. For purposes of behavioral outcomes, accountability for instruction may be established by a description of the processes a student goes through, and course grades may be determined by reporting the student's investment in the course in terms of the performances for which he receives credit. Performance contracting, process-concept grids, and other techniques are suggested as means for minimizing measurement and maximizing useful evaluation teacher accountability.
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EVALUATION: PROBLEMS IN EVALUATING SPEECH COMMUNICATION PERFORMANCE

By

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A paper presented at the convention of the Speech Communication Association in San Francisco, California. December 30, 1971.

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When I was taking speech in high school, I was absent on the day that we did pantomines, and somehow talked the teacher out of making up the assignment. It occurs to me that my life has gone along quite well even without that experience. Yet I suppose that in many high school speech classes, whether it seems relevant or not, whether or not it is a totally humiliating experience, each student is still required to present a pantomine.

In junior high school I won an essay contest on the topic "What made Abraham Lincoln Great?" I remember that the essay said that Lincoln was a great man because he was able to distinguish between the important and the essential. Evidently, my high school teacher had made the decision that doing a pantomine was not just valuable, not just important, but essential, because she <u>required</u> each student in the class to do it.

As teachers of speech we are constantly challenged to make distinctions between the important and the essential. Each of us is involved in two contracts in which some of the terms are explicit and many others are assumed. We have one contract with the educational system. We make promises and commitments to society at large, legislators, boards of education, parents, principals and department heads. We also have contracts with our students. They demand at best a relevant and meaningful learning experience, at least a fair course grade for a reasonable investment of time and effort. All too often we find ourselves in conflict when the commitments to these two contracts seem inconsistent or just too overwhelming. I suspect that as a group we have failed in the past to demand all that is essential in our contracts with the educational system while our contracts with students have often insisted on too many things that are important but not essential.

The systems of evaluating speech performances that are used in the 1970's will require us to focus on the essential elements in both of these contracts. Throughout the past decade I think that there have been two major educational trends that will have a strong influence on our evaluation practices in the future. The first is the trend toward the specification of the outcomes of instruction. We are all familiar with the literature, the

legislation and the commissions that advocate, as Robert Majer would put it, "describing what the student is doing when he is understanding group discussion." The second educational trend toward more student-centered teaching is equally familiar. We've read, often with a blush of recognition, the critiques of our schools that tell us that we are educating students "from the neck up" in a setting that they view as a prison, using methods that they perceive as dehumanizing, teaching content and skills that they view as irrelevant. Many of us have been inspired by the descriptions of various alternative school and open classroom experiments. As we consider these two major trends in educational thought, what kinds of speech classrooms, with what kinds of teachers, using what kind of evaluation systems do we envision? The single word that best describes the picture that comes to my mind is schizophrenic.

I was privileged to hear Carl Rogers speak a few weeks ago on the topic of uniting ideas and feelings in learning. Following his speech a member of the audience asked, "What relationship exists between the kind of education you have just described and the pre-planning of objectives?" Rogers answered, "Damned little!" I suppose it is possible that there are teachers who are not bothered by the inconsistencies between these two trends. Maybe you're a behaviorist in the most mechanistic Skinnerian sense who believes in deciding exactly how you would like all of your students to turn out and then reinforcing their behavior toward that end. Or maybe you're the most far out kind of existentialist who walks into class and says, "Hi. I'm a person and you're people. Let's be human together." If so, your role as an evaluator (or a non-evaluator) is very clear. Actually, I don't know many people who approach either of those caricatures. Most of us find much that is appealing in both of the educational trends that I have mentioned. And as a result, most of us get pretty confused.

I'd like to outline the problems we face in three areas of evaluation behavior and then tell you why, for once, I'm more optimistic than Carl Rogers. . .because I believe that we can solve these problems and combine the best of the world of pre-planned objectives with the best of the world of the open classroom.

One kind of evaluation behavior that we'll all be increasingly involved in is the description of the outcomes of instruction. The greatest reservation that I have about this essentially sound imperative is that it is

much easier to specify behavioral outcomes for the psychomotor domain and for the lower level skills in the cognitive domain than it is to describe the behaviors that accompany learnings in the higher level cognitive skills and in the affective domain. Our discipline has traditionally played an integrative role among other academic disciplines and we have claimed that the concepts and skills that we teach are highly transferrable and generalizable. I think that we must be especially cautious in the next decade to maintain this <u>essential</u> emphasis in our contracting with educational systems. The other important, but less essential, specific skills and content areas must not come to be defined as the essence of our discipline merely because they are easy to specify and measure. We must be militant in our refusal to sell out to the kind of "cost accounting mentality" that urges us to de-emphasize our essential objectives--analysis, synthesis, application and evaluation skills and attitudes, values and feelings--just because we cannot <u>at the moment</u> specifically describe and measure the manifestations of these learnings.

A second kind of evaluation behavior is providing feedback to students about the effects of a communicative act. This feedback may be written or oral, verbal or non-verbal, immediate or delayed, subjective or objective, descriptive or prescriptive. We know from learning theory that knowledge of results is a critical reinforcer, and we know that in communication behavior particularly awareness of the impact of a message on the receiver is essential to increasing communicative effectiveness. The major reservation that I have about this kind of evaluation behavior is that neither teachers or students have been adequately trained in giving feedback in ways that will sustain a growthful dialogue. We do not have a coherent body of research from which to draw principles governing feedback behavior in the classroom. My review of the literature in this area revealed many theoretical writings . . "dos and don'ts of criticizing student speeches". . .and many studies in laboratory settings which related principles of learning theory to verbal behavior. But over a twenty year period I found fewer than a dozen empirical studies either describing or analyzing the effects of various methods of giving feedback in the speech classroom.[1]

Moreover, we have almost no knowledge of the emotional impact of speech feedback on individual students. Our indirect and anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that even the most well-intentioned, constructively phrased speech feedback can have damaging emotional results. Gerald Phillips et al. put it well when they say,"You can criticize a person's tie and he can pass if off rather lightly, but when you criticize a person's speech much more is felt. The whole personality is involved."[2]

A third kind of evaluation behavior we're involved in is measurement, which I define as assigning numbers according to rules. As early as the 1940's we had empirical evidence that speech teachers were not applying valid or reliable measures to the effectiveness of speech performances. Thirty years later, after extensive research into rating behavior, rating scale development and factor analytical studies of perceived communication effectiveness, where do we stand? In a paper presented at the Western Speech Communication Convention last month Larry Steward reviewed the research in this area and drew the following conclusions:

> . . .study after study indicates that we as teachers differ widely with each other, and even with ourselves over time. . .the thrust of the research is that, if we decided on a single system of evaluation, provided training for all of us in that single system, and then did not allow anyone to make evaluations until after several years of service, then we might achieve reliable results. . .I must report that there is less room for optimism now, as to the discovery of an efficient method of evaluation, than there was in 1943.[3]

If measurement is assigning numbers according to rules, all of this evidence suggests that we are not even close to discovering those mysterious rules that govern our grading behavior. Yet teachers continue to assign numerical ratings or letter grades to speech performances as though they were really measuring something. Robert Bostrom has this response to our grading practices:

> . . .it stretches the imagination to assume that the result of the complicated inter-relationship we have built is going to be a five point interval scale called A B C D F which, by happy coincidence, is the same kind of judgment the registrar asks us to submit each quarter.[4]

Even with all the problems attending these three kinds of evaluation behavior, - describing instructional outcomes, providing feedback, and measuring effectiveness - I would like to offer two optimistic predictions about the kinds of evaluation systems that will emerge in speech classes over the next decade. First, I see our concept of evaluation and feedback becoming much broader. Instead of the teacher presenting an oral and written critique of formal speech performances and perhaps inviting a few class comments, the trend is toward immediate, on-going feedback of all communication behavior, with a greatly increased emphasis on the interpersonal communication of small groups and dyads. I see the teacher's role becoming much more authentic and spontaneous. Teachers are owning their responses instead of attributing them to textbooks or "good speakers". They are acknowledging the subjectivity and fallibility of their responses. Instead of saying "That was a poorly organized speech," they are saying, "I got lost." Instead of saying "Don't interrupt," they are saying, "I felt a little uncomfortable a minute ago because I wanted to listen to you but I wasn't sure if Jim was finished with what he was saying." In such a system, an essential ingredient of effective feedback is present: reciprocity. The teacher's own communication behavior is open to subjective, immediate student response.

As the teacher's evaluations become less central and less sacred, there will be a concomitant increase in the role of peer evaluation and self evaluation. Among the peer evaluation techniques that are becoming more prominent are: more <u>real class discussions</u> of speech performances, more use of students as process observers, more use of audience surveys as means of assessing the effectiveness of informative and persuasive discourse, and finally more use of appropriate human relations exercises and "light encounter" techniques that encourage students to discover and express their responses to each other as communicators. Among the self evaluation techniques that are gaining in popularity are: student journals of daily communication experiences, self-analysis papers before and after speech performances where the student describes <u>his</u> goals for the experience and <u>his</u> assessment of the outcome, and more use of audio and videotape recordings of classroom communication which the individual student may review in private and respond to according to his own needs.

My second prediction is that measurement of speech performance will play a far less central role in the speech classroom. Most of us have said for years that we hate grading and that we wish we could grade on a pass/fail basis. Recently more and more teachers have adopted that system, at least for the measurement of individual class assignments. I, for one, have graded my last speech performance! My only measurements of speech performances, essay exams and student papers and projects for the last few semesters have been the binary measurement of "credit" or "no credit yet." I am as explicit as possible about the conditions for receiving credit. If I can't specify and justify the conditions to the student's satisfaction, I omit them. I have been much more confident that I can make reasonably objective and reliable judgments under this system. I can say, "Yes, you gave a speech that had a clear thesis sentence, and introduction, body and conclusion, used at least four different forms of support from at least three different sources" or "No, you didn't." I don't have those ridiculous conversations with students where I hear myself lamely justifying why I gave a speech a C+ instead of a B- while suspecting deep inside that C means o.k., B means I liked it and A means I liked it a lot.

Of course I still make judgments and express those judgments. But when I say, "I loved your introduction" or"I was really let down by your conclusion" or "I felt like I wanted to hear a few more examples of your second point," I'm responding and feeding back my response. I like myself better, and thus probably function better as a teacher, when I admit that, instead of pretending that I'm measuring something.

For the forseeable future, one other kind of measurement will remain incumbent on speech teachers. We will probably have to continue to give course grades something like A, B, C, D or F to each student. The alternative of allowing students to grade themselves on their perceptions of their own personal learning might be ideal, but for many of us our contract with the educational system binds us, in conscience or in fact, to guarantee some sort of correlation between course grades and our stated objectives for the course. There is no reason, however, that course grades must reflect the distinction between meeting our objectives, meeting them very well and meeting them fantastically well. Criterion measures in objectives can be binary and grades above C can express that students have met additional objectives (of ours or their own) or that they have chosen to

meet some course objectives through doing more projects than were required. Rod Hart describes his system of giving course grades in this way:

> Whichever system I decide upon, it always is designed to record the amount of investment a student decides to make in the course. A kid does as much or as little as he wants and his grade is a function of that investment.[5]

In short, I think that some sort of contract based on the quantity of work for which credit was received would best allow us to honor both our educational contracts. The teacher keeps some element of prescription over the course experience and some level of quality control, yet every student of reasonable intelligence and ability is allowed to attain any grade that he is willing to commit himself to work for.

Time does not permit me to elaborate on the specific systems that are being used or might be used to implement this approach. Basically, there are three steps that a teacher goes through.

1. Establishing course objectives. Here is where some real soul searching comes in as we try to distinguish between the important and the essential. Will the world or the student really suffer if you omit: The student will understand the principles of parliamentary procedure? If your best professional judgment says yes, then include it. Otherwise, as Peg Bracken's cookbook says about leftover food, "When in doubt, throw it out." I predict that you will find yourself writing more course objectives like: The student will understand the role of audience analysis in a variety of communicative forms and settings, including at least two of the following: persuasive speaking before a student audience, persuasive speaking before a community audience, a debate, a panel discussion, a formal business meeting, a dramatic production, an oral interpretation program, etc.

2. The second step, after the establishment of objectives, is for the teacher to generate (and describe and weight and provide resources for) several communication experiences which might accomplish each course objective. For instance, a student might meet the objective of understanding communication models by reading chapter seven and answering the study questions at the end, passing an objective test, writing a book report on any of several books you could specify, presenting a symposium discussion on models, or designing his own communication model. If you feel that these activities involve vastly different amounts of time or educational value, then you will

have to go to some sort of point system where credit for one might count 5 points and credit for another counts 15 points.

3. This leads us to the third step. The teacher establishes a contract for course grades that is clear and understandable to the student. One very simple model that each person here is familiar with is the scout handbook system. I remember that when I got the outdoor cooking badge, every girl in the troop had to make a tin can stove, but some of us made those awful things out of graham crackers and marshmallows and Hershey Bars and some other girls were making pancakes and some of the girls were making cakes in paper bags. Somebody older and wiser had decided that we had to do the projects with the stars beside them, but I felt pretty important picking out which other projects I wanted to do. Sometimes I even did extra ones! So the simplest course contract says: for a C do the starred activities and any three others, for a B any six others, for an A any 9 others. More complex contracts use point systems: For a C you must earn credit for activities totalling 100 points including the two takehome exams and at least three speech performances including the informative speech and the persuasive speech. For a B you must receive credit for activities totalling 150 points, etc.

A final system, called the process-concept grid (which I borrowed from my sister's fourth grade science class) is even more complex. On the vertical dimension of the grid you list the processes that you want the student to experience. These might be drawn from one of the taxonomies such as: comprehension, analysis-synthesis, application, and evaluation. Or you might develop your own list such as: listening critically, doing research, organizing material, delivering speeches, etc. On the horizontal dimension you would list concepts of content areas such as argumentation, group dynamics, communication theory, mass media, etc. Then you generate activities that fit each square. The contract reads something like: for a C receive credit for any ten activities including at least one activity from each of the starred squares, etc.

These new approaches to grading create all kinds of new problems in scheduling and record keeping and they require a tremendous amount of time to establish since nearly every activity will require a separate and detailed handout and certain resource materials. There are some creative ways of dealing with these problems that various teachers have devised. Scheduling

can be turned over to the students to work out as a group task. Brian Hollern handled the problem of student procrastination in submitting the projects by giving bonus points for activities completed before a certain date.

I am optimistic about the systems of evaluation that I see emerging in the 1970's. Teachers and researchers are responding responsibly to the demands for the specification of the outcomes of instruction without compromising their professional and personal integrity.[7] The scope of evaluation is being broadened and the inherently subjective nature of many of our responses to the complex communicative act is being acknowledged. While the measurement of speech effectiveness must continue to be of concern to theory builders, classroom teachers are limiting their measurement behavior to judgments that they can make with reasonable reliability. Most important, the entire system is becoming more valid. Students will stop working to psyche out the elusive image that each of us has as the "great communicator" and start to deal with more realistic and relevant communication problems. The systems that are emerging are based on more authentic, role-free student teacher relationships. They acknowledge the individual differences in students' life goals and learning styles and require the student to take more responsibility for the planning and evaluating of his own educational experiences. Teachers are struggling with the difficult distinctions between the important and the essential and are developing contracts that represent good faith both with educational systems and with students.

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Author Abstract:

Evaluation: Problems in Evaluating Speech Communication Performance, Jo Sprague, San Jose State College.

The practice of making teachers accountable for specific outcomes of instruction will have a positive impact on speech education only if systems of accountability are negotiated and classroom evaluation systems are established with an awareness of other important educational trends: student demands for "relevance", the individualization of instruction, more role-free student-teacher relationships, etc.

This paper distinguishes between evaluation, measurement and reports of terminal behavior.

1. Evaluation. Any response to a speech performance provides useful feedback to the communicator. In addition to the teacher's evaluation of the performance against "established standards", it is argued that a teacher's subjective responses should be combined with more extensive use of peer evaluation and self evaluation. All of these forms of feedback provide *subjective* but relevant sources of information about the communicative act. None of these should have any bearing on the teacher's accountability to the educational system or the student's course grades.

2. Measurement. Even if a valid and reliable measurement of speech performances were possible, it would be undesirable in terms of other course objectives ascribed to by most teachers. While refinement of measurement techniques should be continued for the improvement of written examinations and speech contests, the only measurement of classroom performances should be a binary credit or no credit judgment. Criteria for receiving credit for a performance should be explicit and objective.

3. Behavioral Outcomes. Accountability for instruction may be established by a description of the processes a student goes through, and course grades may be determined by reporting the student's investment in the course in terms of the performances for which he receives credit. Performance contracting, process-concept grids, the Scout Handbook methods, and other techniques are suggested as means for minimizing measurement and maximizing useful evaluation, teacher accountability and fairness in course grades.